DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 091 407 TM 003 618

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TITLE Evaluating the Effectiveness of a Program Used in School Situations Characterized By High Pupil Absenteeism and Attrition.
PUB DATE [Apr 74]
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Chicago, Illinois, April, 1974)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.75 HC-$1.50 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Achievement; *Attendance; *English (Second Language); Language Proficiency; *Language Programs; Language Skills; Program Effectiveness; *Program Evaluation; Spanish Speaking
IDENTIFIERS SWRL English Language and Concepts Program

ABSTRACT

A study was conducted in conjunction with a year-long tryout of the SWRL English Language and Concepts Program for Spanish-Speaking children to determine the effects of periodic and seasonal absenteeism on student performance. Procedures were established for obtaining enroute criterion-referenced pupil performance and attendance data from eight participating school districts. The schools included in the analysis represent various California demographic situations: metropolitan U.S./Mexico border area, schools in a large Spanish speaking community, schools in the inner city, schools in pocket areas surrounded by English speaking communities and county schools serving migrant families. Results showed that pupils who maintained continuous contact with the instruction attained the program objectives while those who were periodically absent did not. This happened in spite of systematic procedures employed by teachers to ensure that all pupils progressed through the program without skipping an instructional segment, irrespective of absence rate. (Author/BB)

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EVALUATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF A PROGRAM USED IN SCHOOL SITUATIONS CHARACTERIZED BY HIGH PUPIL ABSENTEEISM AND ATTRITION

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TM 003 618

Paper Presented To The
American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting
Chicago, Illinois
April 15-19, 1974

EVALUATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF A PROGRAM USED IN SCHOOL SITUATIONS CHARACTERIZED BY HIGH PUPIL ABSENTEEISM AND ATTRITION

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INTRODUCTION

The 1971-1972 tryout (Molina, 1973) exercised, under standard school conditions, the materials, procedures, and accompanying teacher training system of the SWRL English Language and Concepts Program for Spanish-Speaking Children. Eight school districts, 33 schools, 43 classes, and 883 Spanish-speaking children were involved. The inquiry reported here is a follow-up of that study. At the end of the 1972-1973 school year, follow-up data were collected from 6 school districts involving 24 schools. The data included information on 138 first and second grade children who had finished the Program during the 1971-1972 tryout. Pupil test performance and pupil attendance records were obtained and used in the analysis reported in this paper.

PROCEDURES

Six of the eight school districts participating in the 1972-1973 study agreed to participate in the follow-up inquiry. The 24 schools included in the analysis represent various California demographic situations: metropolitan U.S./Mexico border area, schools in a large Spanish-speaking community, schools in the inner city, schools in pocket areas surrounded by English speaking communities, and county schools serving migrant families.

Assessment Measures

Individual Entry Test scores and End-of-Program Test scores were used from the data collected during the 1971-1972 tryout. Three additional data sources were used: 1973 End-of-Year Test, Descriptive Ratings completed by teachers, and Attendance Records.

1973 End-of-Year Test. This measure was constructed for purposes of the inquiry. The measure includes 40 items: 15 items require psychomotor responses to imperatives in standard English, 15 require oral responses in which one-word responses are acceptable, and 10 require full sentence responses. The substance of the test items is referenced to general English rather than to the LCS program.

Descriptive Ratings. Teachers were asked to rate pupils in terms of performance in English with classroom peers in the regular classroom. Descriptive ratings were specifically referenced to the following skill and achievement areas: Reading, Oral Language Development, Writing, Mathematics/Science, and Social Studies. The teachers rated student performance in terms of four ordered categories: (1) Cannot do task, (2) Experiences difficulty, (3) Performs adequately, and (4) Excellent performance.

Attendance Records. The number of days absent for individual children for the 1972-1973 school year was obtained from school records.

ANALYSES

In the participating schools, 214 children had received instruction in LCS in 1971-1972. Seventy-six of these children had transferred to other schools by the end of the 1972-1973 school year, thus were not included in the follow-up data. For all practical purposes, pupils for whom data were received were no different from transferred pupils in terms of entry test scores; the mean score for pupils for whom data were received was 24.72; for transferred pupils it was 22.70. Teacher ratings were received from 69 teachers for 108 pupils; absentee records were received for 110 pupils. The remaining 17 teachers who did not provide information stated that they were too busy at the time to complete the forms. The mean entry test score of those children for whom ratings were not received was 27.76; the mean score was 27.03 for those children for whom absentee records were not received. This indicates that "non-response" pupils had slightly higher average entering language proficiency than the group of 138 children for whom complete data were available for analysis.

Frequency Distributions of Test Performance and Teacher Ratings

Table 1 shows the frequency distribution of pupils on the general English proficiency test. The high levels of performance indicate that after a lapse of one year, an LCS graduate tended to retain or improve upon the language proficiency acquired in the LCS instruction.

Table 1

Distribution of 1973 End-of-Year Test Scores

Score Range	Children	
	N	%
36-40	65	47
31-35	46	33
26-30	22	16
21-25	4	3
15-20	1	1
Total	138	100

Table 2 shows the frequency distributions of teachers' estimates of the LCS graduates' proficiency at the end of their next school year in regular classes. The ratings again indicate a generally high level of performance, suggesting that the school success experienced in LCS is generalizing to other areas of instruction.

Interrelations Among Measures

Table 3 includes the correlation coefficients reflecting the relationships of the nine regular classroom skill area ratings based on 1973 pupil performance, the two LCS - related variables based on 1972 performance, the LCS End-of-Year Test administered in 1973, and the absence rates for both years. Most compelling are the r-values for the Entry Test administered prior to LCS instruction in 1971 and all other variables; nc[illegible] is statistically significant ($p < .05$). Both

Table 2

Distribution of Teacher Ratings

Task	1 Cannot Do Task	2 Experiences Difficulty	3 Performs Adequately	4 Excellent Performance
1. Reading: Interprets written symbols as meaningful communication.	6	33	60	9
2. Reading: Reads orally with fluent standard English, pronunciation and intonation.	9	38	54	7
3. Oral Language Development: Has sufficient control of language to ask and answer questions in class.	2	28	63	15
4. Oral Language Development: Has sufficient control of language to function in the classroom.	2	20	65	21
5. Writing Skills: Competency in writing skills.	5	28	63	12
6. Math/Science: Sufficient proficiency in using Math/Science concepts, e.g., numbers, numerals, numeration, including adding and subtracting.	2	23	68	15
7. Math/Science: Identifies and names space relationships, comparisons, e.g., above, under, big/bigger/biggest.	1	24	69	14
8. Math/Science: Identifies and names set concepts and basic geometric figures, e.g., members of a set, number of a set, circle, square.	1	18	69	20
9. Social Studies: Sufficient language proficiency to deal effectively with health and safety requirements at school.	3	5	80	20

Table 3

Correlation Matrix for LCS Variables

Variables	Task Ratings									Entry Test	E.O.P. Test '72	E.O.Y. Test '73	Days Absent '72	Days Absent '73
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Reading Interpretation	---	.71*	.55*	.62*	.56*	.51*	.49*	.56*	.45*	.01	.26*	.33*	-.21	-.12
2. Reading Fluency		---	.55*	.59*	.63*	.56*	.52*	.56*	.39*	.06	.38*	.39*	-.32*	-.15
3. Oral Develop, Ask/Answer			---	.81*	.45*	.54*	.52*	.53*	.63*	.04	.27*	.31*	-.35*	-.28*
4. Oral Develop, Function				---	.63*	.64*	.60*	.62*	.74*	.04	.24*	.41*	-.37*	-.33*
5. Writing Skills					---	.59*	.47*	.46*	.46*	-.08	.19*	.39*	-.31*	-.21*
6. Math/Science						---	.65*	.69*	.55*	-.11	.32*	.35*	-.21	-.28*
7. Math/Science Space Relationships							---	.73*	.49*	.01	.31*	.27*	-.20*	-.25*
8. Math/Science Sets and Figures								---	.62*	-.06	.28*	.26*	-.34*	-.30*
9. Social Studies Health and Safety									---	-.10	.18	.25*	-.35*	-.36*
10. Entry Test										---	.17	-.10	-.02	.04
11. E.O.P. Test '72											---	.53*	-.04	-.09
12. E.O.Y. Test '73												---	-.03	-.19
13. Days Absent '72													---	.80*
14. Days Absent '73														---
$\bar{X}$	2.66	2.55	2.84	2.97	2.76	2.89	2.89	3.00	3.08	24.72	54.55	34.24	11.59	12.52
S.D.	.71	.74	.67	.68	.71	.65	.62	.63	.58	12.05	5.26	4.12	9.42	11.66

* $p<.05$

success in LCS and subsequent success in regular classroom instruction appears independent of pre-instruction English language proficiency.

The End-of-Year Test '73 correlated positively and significantly with all nine skill area proficiency ratings. The End-of-Program Test '72 correlated positively and significantly with eight skill area proficiency ratings. The r-values ranged from .41 with Oral Language Development to .19 with Writing skills.

That continuity of instructional contact by the pupil is more critical than his entering skills level appears to be supported by the correlational data. Both 1972 and 1973 absence rates tend to be regularly associated with depressed performance ratings by the teacher in 1973. That absence rate is not significantly correlated with the test performance data and tends to be independent of the reading task cluster is of interest. Reading instruction like LCS tends to be supported by a relatively high emphasis upon instructional materials and by a comparatively high allotment of instructional time. It may be that this combination is sufficiently robust to neutralize absence rate as a performance depressing factor for most pupils. If one analyzes classroom instruction associated with the other performance areas it seems clear that the clinical interaction of the teacher and pupil is not supported by either a plethora of instructional materials or a favorable allotment of instructional time. This conjecturing suggests that continuity of instructional contact is necessary but not sufficient; that a critical ingredient is the availability of a systematic set of materials and procedures for the teacher's use in providing instructional continuity over time and absences.

REFERENCES

Molina, Huberto. The SWRL English Language and Concepts Program for Spanish-Speaking Children: 1971-1972 Tryout, SWRL Educational Research and Development, Technical Report No. 46, 1973.